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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CHENGDU 000280

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PHUM SOCI VOA CH

SUBJECT: A TIBETAN ENGLISH TEACHER TALKS TURKEY

REF: A) CHENGDU 115; B) 08 CHENGDU 42; C) CHENGDU 257;

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CLASSIFIED BY: David E. Brown, Consul General, U.S. Consulate General Chengdu.

REASON: 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: A Tibetan English teacher, school principal, and amateur drama director discussed navigating Tibet's difficult political climate and introducing students to foreign cultures through English language instruction. Norbu once worked with foreign NGOs, but since friends in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) Public Security Bureau warned him against working with NGOs ("one of the "top ten security threats facing the TAR"), he steers clear of them. He uses material from YouTube, VOA and other blocked websites for his classes because the young adults of his evening English class have no difficulties surmounting the Chinese government's Great Red Firewall. Norbu's advanced English students have learned, translated into Tibetan, and done a dramatic re-enactment in English of President Obama's inaugural address. End Summary.

The English Teacher Runs School,
Evening Class and Tibetan Language Drama Club

¶2. (C) Norbu is: a 30-year old, part-owner of an 800-student, English language school in Lhasa; the convener of a Tibetan-language drama club; and the English teacher at a small, 18-student evening English language school for young adults at a Lhasa hotel. Norbu majored in English education at Shaanxi Normal University in Xi'an after attending a Tibetan Middle School in Shanghai, and a Tibetan High School in Tianjin. [Note: Since the middle 1980s, many promising young Tibetans, and particularly the children of Tibetan party and government cadres, are sent outside the TAR for their middle and high school education so that they will develop near-native speaker mastery of Chinese. In many major Chinese cities, including Chengdu, Beijing, and Shanghai, there are special Tibetan high schools (ref A). End Note.]

¶3. (C) Norbu added that, despite focusing heavily on the Chinese language from middle school through university outside of the TAR, he still achieved a good level of reading and writing as well as speaking Tibetan because of the strong insistence and help of his grandfather. [Note: Many young Tibetans who get a good education and acquire excellent Chinese in schools outside the TAR bitterly regret their shortcomings in reading and writing Tibetan (ref B). End Note] Norbu leads a Tibetan

language theatrical troupe composed of young adults. His English teaching is imbued with a theatrical style, e.g. via the English language speeches that he has his students perform.

¶4. (C) ConGenOff asked Norbu if he agreed with Tashi Tsering's argument (ref C) that the repealed 1983 law on the use of the Tibetan language in the TAR should be re-instated. Norbu replied "Tashi Tsering is full of talk. A law that was never put into effect is the same thing as no law!"

¶5. (C) When asked if he agreed with what some Han people say that "Tibetans can't eat bitterness like ethnic Han", he replied, "I completely agree. Tibetans aren't as hard working as ethnic Han. Tibetans need to be very hard working!" (ref C)

Staying Safe: Knowing the Sensitive Areas,
Ensuring High Level Officials Know He Is OK

¶6. (C) When ConGenOff asked if teaching English could be politically sensitive in the TAR, Norbu answered "I received a Chinese middle school and high school education outside of the TAR, and university education at Shaanxi Normal University in Xi'an, so I know how to work with the Han, and where the sensitive areas are." He added: "I regularly invite higher ranking TAR party and government officials, including a former vice mayor of Lhasa, to my classes and special school ceremonies so that will be comfortable with what I am doing." He added

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that "Winston Churchill said that 'Politicians are whores who run after the favor of the rich.' I intend to become rich."

TAR Public Security Says

International NGOs are Serious Security Threat

¶7. (C) Norbu said that he had worked with foreign NGOs in Lhasa before, but now avoids them. He explained that he had found their support was always short term and uncertain. More importantly, several of his friends in TAR Public Security had warned him that TAR Public Security considered foreign NGOs one of the top ten security threats facing the TAR, so he should not seek support from them. Even meeting with foreigners can be sensitive. He mentioned that he would like to meet with a group of foreigners who teach at Tibet University to learn more about foreign language teaching methods, but has not because he heard that it is politically sensitive for a Tibetan to meet with a group of foreigners.

Tibetan Students Re-Enact President Obama's Inaugural Address

18. (C) Norbu uses some USG educational videos in his lessons, including a high definition video of President Obama's inauguration with Tibetan subtitles. Students learn the meaning of the phrases and then they themselves do a dramatic re-enactment of President Obama's inaugural address. Norbu uses in his English lessons videos that he or his students have downloaded from VOA, other U.S. government websites such as whitehouse.gov, YouTube and other websites. During ConGenOff's visit, the class watched a VOA English-language educational film about a young couple trying to find their way to Mt. Rushmore. Norbu commented that his evening class of Tibetan young adults all have laptops, and all know how to get around the PRC government's blocking of YouTube and other websites.

Teacher to Students:

"This isn't America. You Have No Right to Privacy!"

19. (C) Norbu says he motivates his students to do their homework well by posting it on the internet so that they will be embarrassed if they do it poorly. He tells his students, "This is not the United States! You have no right to privacy!" ConGenOff attended an hour-and-a-half English class in Norbu's well equipped (a big video screen at front of the room and miniature stage at right for student dramatic productions) room in a Lhasa hotel three blocks from the Barkhor. Norbu uses the same locale for a Tibetan drama club for young adults.

Questions About the United States from Tibetan Students

110. (C) During the class, Norbu first had the students serve as interpreters for him -- they relayed the question from Norbu, and then translated ConGenoff's answers into Tibetan. Later, Norbu served as the interpreter as he asked that evening's class of 15 young Tibetan adults to ask me questions, which Norbu would then translate into Tibetan. The questions were:

-- How many black people are there in the United States?

-- Why are American universities so good?

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-- Why does the United States owe so much money to the rest of the world after the financial crisis?

-- How would you compare the Tibetan heart, the Han heart and the American heart?

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